

Adjournment Debate

ground checks. Their deportation order must be effected prior to the issuance of immigrant visas.

I am glad the hon. member brought this matter to the attention of the minister. Indeed he is quite right that there are certain areas with regard to refugee status that are changing.

IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE BOARD

Hon. Warren Allmand (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce): Mr. Speaker, on February 4, I asked the Minister of State for Employment and Immigration to initiate an independent inquiry into the serious allegations that the members of the Immigration and Refugee Board were subject to political influence in making their decisions, often contrary to the evidence that was put before them in the hearings.

These allegations were made by certain former members of the board in stories which were published in the *Le Devoir* in Montreal last week and were made more extensively near the end of last year by Dr. Sam Ifejika who resigned from the board in protest but issued a 24-page document in which he set out various cases in which he himself had been subject to influence and pressure by senior officials with the department.

This is supposed to be an independent quasi-judicial body. The members of the board are to listen to the evidence and make their decisions based on the evidence. We must remember that in these cases lives are at risk. People have fled from countries where their lives have been threatened, where they have been put in prison. For them it is a life and death issue.

What answer did I get from the minister? First of all she asked me—and perhaps it is because she is new in her position and she has not been properly briefed—to provide her with details. All the details were provided in the brief which has been tabled with the department and the minister of immigration, the 24-page brief by Dr. Ifejika. There are further allegations available in the articles which have been published in *Le Devoir*. Regarding my comments with respect to appointments to the board, she tells me that the committee has the right to review appointments to the board.

Everybody knows that even though we review those appointments in committee we can do nothing about it.

This is not like the American system where the committees of Congress can turn down appointments. All we can do is review them. If we find they are bad, there is not much we can say. We can make a recommendation but that does not go very far.

I want to see a full independent investigation into these serious allegations. If the government has nothing to hide, it should agree to such an investigation.

I hope today that the parliamentary secretary will take seriously not simply my remarks but the allegations that have been made outside this House by others and not simply read to us some statement prepared by officials in the department.

That kind of response to the questions we raise in the adjournment debate makes a farce of this whole procedure and a farce of parliamentary reform. Unless the parliamentary secretary can get up and give me an honest response to the questions I have asked and to the allegations I have made, I would prefer that he or she sit in their seat and not say anything at all.

Mr. Ken James (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Labour): Mr. Speaker, I would like to respond to the member because I know he has a great deal of interest in the board and is responding to some of the information that has been put forward by others.

The allegations of interference with the independence of the members in the minds of the minister and those in the department is unfounded. The IRB members are independent decision makers. Their responsibility is to determine each refugee claim based upon its merit. The board has a responsibility to see that the decisions are fair and just to the claimants and consistent in that similar sets of facts produce similar decisions.

I think if the hon. member would look at a lot of those decisions or hear them, he would probably see that.

In this respect Bill C-86, as he would probably know, will provide the chairperson of the Immigration and Refugee Board with greater control over the quality of the decision making. In case of the incapacity or incompetence or misconduct of any member, the chairman may recommend to the Minister of Justice that an inquiry be held to consider if the member should be suspended without pay or removed from office.